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AUTHOR Wong, Ray E.  
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## ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to ascertain whether future teachers, particularly students of color, can be identified at the 7th and 8th grade levels, and to determine whether their interest or noninterest in teaching is related to how they feel and think about school. Participants were 7th and 8th grade students (N=646) from eight California schools. To measure students' potential interest in teaching, a survey instrument was developed; to determine perceptions of school/classroom environment, the sample was asked to complete a true-false and forced choice instrument, the "Quality of School Life." Findings indicated that it was possible to identify 7th and 8th grade students who were interested in teaching. Additional findings showed: that male students and students with negative perceptions of the school/classroom environment were less inclined to express interest in teaching; that students who felt part of the school were more apt to consider teaching as a career choice; that Asian students had a more positive perception of the school/classroom environment than African-American and Hispanic groups; and that European-Americans were no more likely to consider teaching as a career choice than any other cultural group. Information on demographic characteristics of respondents and results of statistical analyses are provided in tabular form. (Contains 15 references.)  
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The Relationship between  
Interest in Teaching as a Career Choice  
and Perceptions of School/Classroom Environment  
of 7th and 8th Grade Students

by Ray E. Wong

Department of Teacher Education  
College of Education  
Weber State University  
Ogden, Utah 84408-1304

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of the American Educational Research Association,  
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## **Abstract**

### **The relationship between interest in teaching as a career choice and perceptions of school/classroom environment of 7th and 8th grade students**

The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between interest in teaching and perceptions of school/classroom environment. The results of the study generally support the notion that when students feel a part of the school, they may be more apt to consider teaching as a career choice. In addition, other issues related to young students' thinking of teaching were reviewed. The study was also interested in the student of color population and their potential interest in the teaching profession as projections of the number of teachers of color has been on the decline. Recommendations were developed based on the results of the study.

The relationship between interest in teaching as a career choice  
and perceptions of school/classroom environment  
of 7th and 8th grade students

## Introduction

The teaching profession is undergoing demographic changes as is the student population during the next decade and into the twenty-first century: the number of students of color will increase while the number of teachers of color will decrease (Alston, 1988; Zapata, 1988; Hawley, 1989; *American Teacher*, 1988). The study attempts to ascertain whether future teachers, particularly from the student of color population, can be identified at the 7th and 8th grade levels and to determine whether their interest or noninterest in teaching is related to how they feel and think about school. A major question of the study is how does student feelings and reactions to school relate to their interest or non-interest in teaching as a career choice. Another question is related to the reasons or motives students presently have in their consideration of teaching as a potential career choice: what is motivating to today's students to consider teaching?

The review of literature supports the theoretical possibility of a relationship between interest in teaching as a career choice and perception of school/classroom environment. The relationship may be the result of anticipatory socialization into the teaching profession as schools and classrooms have been found to influence students in a variety of ways. For example, teachers have influenced students to become teachers (e.g., Fielstra, 1955; Jantzen, 1981; Saxe, 1969; Book & Freeman, 1986; Book, Freeman, & Brousseau, 1985). Also, research has found that teachers have been influential, both directly and indirectly, on how students feel about themselves and their abilities (Mergendoller & Packer, 1985; Csikszentmihalyi & McCormack, 1986). Consequently, students develop positive or negative perceptions of the school environment and how congruent or incongruent they feel they are in that situation.

Seventh and eighth grade students are an appropriate group for the study as they are developmentally in the process of developing, exploring, and formulating potential career options (Erb, 1983). Teachers have been a readily accessible career students have observed and experienced for a number of years. Also, students are a good source of

information about schools and classrooms as they have experienced the school/classroom environment for most of their lives and have developed impressions of schooling and the teaching profession (Moos & David, 1981).

### **Methods**

To ascertain potential interest in teaching as a career choice, students completed a survey developed for the study, **Interest in Teaching as a Career Choice**. To determine students' perceptions of the school/classroom environment, they completed an instrument developed by Joyce Epstein and James McPartland, **Quality of School Life** (see Epstein & McPartland, 1976 for discussion on the concept and measurement).

The Interest in Teaching as a Career Choice included questions specifically related to interest or noninterest in teaching as well as questions which asked students their opinions about teaching and teachers' work, their motives in considering or not considering teaching, as well as questions about their career exploration activities with teachers, parents, and friends. The instrument was modelled after one developed by Mangieri and Kemper (1984).

The Quality of School Life is a 27-item instrument which includes true-false and forced choice response options. From student responses, three subscales were calculated—Commitment to Classwork, Reactions to Teachers, and Satisfaction with School. The subscales added together provided the Quality of School Life scale (0–27 range). The higher the resulting number, the more positive the student was about his/her school environment.

Schools in California with only 7th and 8th grades in their configuration formed the sampling frame. Only schools meeting that condition were included in order to eliminate or minimize the possible effects of school configuration and philosophy. Thirty (30) schools were randomly selected to participate; eight (8) responded positively. From the eight schools, 646 students were selected by the building administrators to respond to the instruments (see table 1 for a description of the respondents). The method utilized to select students for participation was left to the discretion of the building administrators.

The study utilized SPSS<sup>x</sup> procedures for statistical analysis to test the hypotheses: oneway ANOVA, ANOVA, and discriminant analysis.

## Results and Discussion

The basic findings of the study include:

- Male students were less inclined to express interest in teaching as a possible career choice than female students (table 2). This was statistically significant at the .05 level.
- Contrary to one of the statistical hypotheses, European-Americans were not any more likely to consider teaching as a career choice than any other cultural group (table 2).
- Students who have negative perceptions of school/classroom environment were less likely to indicate an interest in teaching (table 3). This was statistically significant at the .05 level.
- Asian students have a more positive perception of the school/classroom environment than any other cultural group (table 4). This was statistically significant at the .05 level and the Scheffé procedure noted the differences between the Asian group and both the Afro and Hispanic groups.
- There were statistically significant differences in the motives and reasons in considering teaching between those who expressed interest in teaching and those who did not (tables 5 and 6). The classification results indicate that 91.42% of the cases included in the analysis were correctly classified.
- It was possible to develop a predictor model using discriminant analysis which examined only the bipolar extremes of interest in teaching to distinguish between those who expressed an interest in teaching and those who did not (tables 7 and 8). The classification results indicate that 90.66% of the cases included in the analysis were correctly classified.

The predictor model indicated that students could be differentiated in their interest or noninterest in teaching on the following bases. Students who are interested in teaching want to teach children and work with people. They would not mind working for just 9-10 months a year, believe that teachers make a lot of money and receive many salary raises, but they are not motivated by the desire to earn a lot of money. They also have a positive view of the school/classroom environment and feel that teachers get respect from their students. Family influences are indicated as they believe their families want them to be teachers and their families talk about future opportunities. Furthermore, they talk with their friends about future possibilities.

Overall, perceptions of the school/classroom environment did have a relationship to interest in teaching as exemplified by more than one of the hypotheses tested. In addition, the perceptions of the school/classroom environment, as measured by the Quality of School Life score, did appear as a discriminating variable in the discriminant analysis to develop a predictor model.

### **Recommendations**

Since it is possible to identify 7th and 8th grade students who are interested in teaching, development and implementation of future teachers organizations at those grade levels are appropriate. The organization would be an opportunity to socialize formally prospective teachers, help students clarify their attitudes about teaching as a career, assist students in understanding the nature of the teaching profession, offer opportunities for students to learn basic teaching skills which can be applied with their peers, and provide opportunities to reinforce and strengthen their academic skills and knowledge.

The results of the study indicate that students were generally favorable to their teachers and that some students were committed to and recognized the importance of school work that is done. However, students were generally not satisfied with their school experience. Therefore, in both in-service and pre-service training, teachers and prospective teachers need to develop the skills and knowledge in creating more rewarding and productive learning experiences for students. For example, teachers may need to become aware of students' unique learning needs and learning styles in order to adjust and adapt their teaching styles. Curriculum adjustments may be needed which include content that is relevant for more students. The issues mentioned here are generally embodied in the philosophy of multicultural education.

Results from the study found that students indicated their teachers did not talk very often about careers, occupations, and jobs with them. For 7th and 8th grade students who are in the throes of many changes and transition, discussions about their future are very appropriate and necessary. Though teachers today are feeling quite overwhelmed with mandated curricula and other external pressures related to academic achievement, opportunities to include and integrate exploration and discussion of careers in the curriculum should be encouraged.

As families in the study played an important part in the career development of the 7th and 8th grade students interested in teaching, seminars should be conducted with parents and families to provide them with greater understanding of what prospective teachers need to enter the teaching profession. Furthermore, the families should be trained to develop the skills to assist their child as s/he progresses through the educational process.

Extending what has been recommended, any program or project on the identification and recruitment of prospective teachers beginning with 7th and 8th grade students need to continue through the high school years. High school counselors should be alerted as to the incoming students who have expressed interest in pursuing a teaching career so that appropriate academic planning and guidance can be implemented. Should more states opt to implement teacher testing programs as a criterion for certification or teacher education programs require standardized tests for entrance, students need to be adequately prepared to meet the challenges of becoming a professional educator.

On a more general level, the following recommendation is offered. Though not every student should nor will become a teacher, the school/classroom environment should be positive and provide a rewarding learning experience for *all* students. Even if students do not become teachers, their attitudes about the schooling experience will be transmitted to the next generation of students. Therefore, the entire faculty and staff should be trained in strategies and techniques that will create a positive, warm, and friendly learning environment in which all students feel comfortable and that they belong.

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Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Gender			Grade		
	N	Percentage		N	Percentage
Boys	321	49.7	7th	260	40.2
Girls	325	50.3	8th	386	59.8
Total	646	100.0	Total	646	100.0

  

Culture			School Lunch Program Participation		
	N	Valid Percentage		N	Valid Percentage
Asian	62	9.6	Free	105	18.4
Afro	26	4.0	Reduced	45	7.9
Hispanic	70	10.9	None	420	73.7
Native American	20	3.1	missing	76	
European	395	61.3			
Other	71	11.0			
missing	2				

  

Average Grade			Participate in Extracurricular Activities		
	N	Valid Percentage		N	Valid Percentage
A	171	27.3	Yes	399	62.1
B	297	47.4	No	244	37.9
C	125	20.0	missing	3	
D	25	4.0			
F	8	1.3			
missing	20				

  

Mother's Education			Father's Education		
	N	Valid Percentage		N	Valid Percentage
Did not graduate H.S.	66	11.2	Did not graduate H.S.	50	8.9
H.S. graduate	168	28.4	H.S. graduate	149	26.6
Completed some college	187	31.6	Completed some college	153	27.3
4-year college grad	170	28.8	4-year college grad	208	37.1
missing	55		missing	86	

Table 2. Analysis of Variance—Interest in Teaching by Gender and Culture

Source of Variation	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F-value	p
Main Effects	6	89.963	14.994	9.642	.000
Culture	5	7.563	1.513	0.973	.434
Gender	1	77.588	77.588	49.892	.000
2-way interaction					
Culture x Gender	5	15.029	3.006	1.933	.087
Explained	11	104.993	9.545	6.138	.000
Residual	608	945.513	1.555		
Total	619	1050.506	1.697		

Culture-Gender Group	N	Mean	<p>26 cases not included in the analysis because of missing values</p> <p>The mean on the Interest in Teaching scale for each culture-gender group is shown.</p> <p>1 = very interested in teaching 5 = not at all interested in teaching</p>
Asian males	27	4.00	
Asian females	35	3.34	
Afro males	14	4.52	
Afro females	9	3.17	
Hispanic males	39	3.85	
Hispanic females	26	3.35	
Native American males	9	3.39	
Native American females	10	4.18	
European males	192	3.90	
European females	190	3.08	
Other males	21	3.68	
Other females	48	3.11	
Total	620	3.53	

Table 3. Analysis of Variance—Interest in Teaching by QSL-grouped

Source of Variation	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F-value	p
Between Groups	2	94.29	47.15	30.38	.000
Within Groups	619	960.53	1.55		
Total	621	1054.82			

  

Group Means and Standard Deviations				
Group	N	Mean	S.D.	1 = very interested in teaching 5 = not at all interested in teaching
QSL-low	176	4.02	1.19	
QSL-medium	220	3.63	1.25	
QSL-high	226	3.06	1.28	
Total	622	3.53	1.30	

Scheffé procedure noted significant differences at the .05 level between all three groups

24 cases not included in the analysis because of missing values.

Table 4. Analysis of Variance—Quality of School Life (QSL) by Culture

Source of Variation	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F-value	p
Between Groups	5	990.417	198.083	4.26	.0008
Within Groups	636	29561.167	46.480		
Total	641	30551.584			

  

Group Means and Standard Deviations				0 = low perception of classroom/school environment 27 = high perception of classroom/school environment
Group	N	Mean	S.D.	
Asian	62	16.02	6.14	
Afro	26	10.62	5.52	
Hispanic	69	11.35	6.58	
Native American	20	11.50	7.48	
European	395	13.31	6.92	
Other	70	12.53	7.23	
Total	642	13.11	6.90	

Scheffé procedure noted significant differences at the .05 level between the Asian group and both the Afro and Hispanic groups.

4 cases not included in the analysis because of missing values.

**Table 5. Discriminant Analysis—Bipolar Extremes of the grouped Interest in Teaching Scale—Group Means and Standard Deviations**

Independent Variables	Interested in Teaching		Not Interested in Teaching	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
( 1) I would like to make a lot of money	1.60	0.73	1.29	0.54
( 2) Teachers get a lot of respect from students	3.16	1.06	3.34	0.96
( 3) People don't think teachers are very important	3.41	1.08	3.26	1.05
( 4) I would like very much to teach children	1.78	0.72	3.98	0.94
( 5) Teachers get many salary raises	3.33	0.93	3.65	0.92
( 6) It would cost too much to go to college to become a teacher	3.15	1.23	3.33	1.00
( 7) I really don't want to work with people	4.49	0.72	3.98	0.98
( 8) I would like to work for 12 months a year	3.27	1.21	3.29	1.21
( 9) Teachers don't have a lot of problems with students	3.97	0.90	4.12	0.89
(10) My friends don't think I should be a teacher	3.36	0.91	2.96	0.93
(11) My family thinks I should be a teacher	2.74	0.97	3.70	0.93
(12) Teachers make a lot of money	3.26	1.04	3.77	1.04
(13) I would not mind working for just 9-10 months a year	1.96	0.82	2.74	1.15

**Table 6. Discriminant Analysis—Bipolar Extremes of the grouped Interest in Teaching Scale—Summary Table of Variables Remaining at Conclusion of Analysis**

Variables in order of entry into the analysis	Wilks' lambda at conclusion of analysis	Standardized discriminant function coefficient
( 4) I would like very much to teach children	.45462	0.88441
(13) I would not mind working for just 9-10 months a year	.42535	0.32526
(11) My family thinks I should be a teacher	.41656	0.16265
( 2) Teachers get a lot of respect from students	.40990	-0.20334
( 7) I really don't want to work with people	.40547	-0.13350
( 1) I would like to make a lot of money	.40135	-0.11416
( 5) Teachers get many salary raises	.39834	0.07946
( 3) People don't think teachers are very important	.39648	-0.08860
(10) My friends don't think I should be a teacher	.39476	-0.08710
(12) Teachers make a lot of money	.39374	0.32526

Level of significance for all variables ( $p = .000$ )

**Table 7. Discriminant Analysis—Bipolar Extremes of the grouped Interest in Teaching Scale—Partial Multivariate F Values and Pooled Within-Groups Correlations between Discriminating Variables and Canonical Discriminant Functions**

Source of Variation	Partial Multivariate F Value at Conclusion of Analysis	Item-to-Function Correlation (pooled) Function 1
( 4) I would like very much to teach children	292.7600	0.88266
(13) I would not mind working for just 9-10 months a year	25.5850	0.25903
(11) My family thinks I should be a teacher	5.7186	0.36983
( 2) Teachers get a lot of respect from students	8.8893	0.06513
( 7) I really don't want to work with people	4.2150	-0.19669
( 1) I would like to make a lot of money	2.9217	-0.18462
( 5) Teachers get many salary raises	1.0837	0.12046
( 3) People don't think teachers are very important	1.7824	-0.04776
(10) My friends don't think I should be a teacher	1.7424	-0.15565
(12) Teachers make a lot of money	1.0187	0.17357
( 6) It would cost too much to go to college to become a teacher	0.0973	0.04157
( 8) I would like to work for 12 months a year	0.1293	-0.01061
( 9) Teachers don't have a lot of problems with students	0.5688	0.01241

**Table 8. Discriminant Analysis—Bipolar Extremes of the grouped Interest in Teaching Scale—Group Means and Standard Deviations**

Independent Variables	Interested in Teaching		Not Interested in Teaching	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
(G1) Boys	0.33		0.63	
(R1) Asian	0.06		0.12	
(R2) Afro	0.03		0.04	
(R3) Hispanic	0.10		0.12	
(R4) Native American	0.01		0.04	
(R5) European	0.68		0.63	
( 1) I would like to make a lot of money	1.62	0.72	1.28	0.53
( 2) Teachers get a lot of respect from students	3.21	1.08	3.28	0.96
( 3) People don't think teachers are very important	3.40	1.12	3.28	1.05
( 4) I would like very much to teach children	1.78	0.71	4.04	0.92
( 5) Teachers get many salary raises	3.38	0.86	3.68	0.91
( 6) It would cost too much to go to college to become a teacher	3.26	1.20	3.33	1.03
( 7) I really don't want to work with people	4.53	0.69	4.03	1.00
( 8) I would like to work for 12 months a year	3.26	1.22	3.30	1.22
( 9) Teachers don't have a lot of problems with students	4.01	0.83	4.13	0.89
(10) My friends don't think I should be a teacher	3.21	0.84	2.93	0.93
(11) My family thinks I should be a teacher	2.73	0.89	3.68	0.93
(12) Teachers make a lot of money	3.20	1.01	3.84	1.00
(13) I would not mind working for just 9-10 months a year	1.90	0.76	2.77	1.15
(C1) Do you think about what you will do when you are done with school?	1.65	0.70	1.82	0.88
(C2) Do your teachers talk with you about careers, occupations, and jobs?	2.81	0.92	3.13	0.86
(C3) Do your family talk with you about careers, occupations, and jobs?	2.03	0.83	2.29	0.95
(C4) Do you and your friends talk about careers, occupations, and jobs?	2.65	0.96	2.90	0.93
(GPA) Grade Point Average	1.86	0.72	2.05	0.87
(Extra) Extracurricular Activity Participation	1.35		1.38	
(Lunch) Lunch Program	2.61		2.67	
(MotherEd) Mother's Education	2.81	0.90	2.83	1.00
(FatherEd) Father's Education	2.96	1.01	2.92	1.03
(QSL) Quality of School Life Scale	16.86	6.19	11.48	6.66



**Table 9. Discriminant Analysis—Bipolar Extremes of the grouped Interest in Teaching Scale—Summary Table of Variables Remaining at Conclusion of Analysis**

Variables in order of entry into the analysis	Wilks' lambda at conclusion of analysis	Standardized discriminant function coefficient
( 4) I would like very much to teach children	.43231	0.87688
(13) I would not mind working for just 9-10 months a year	.40419	0.34839
(12) Teachers make a lot of money	.39297	0.14551
( 2) Teachers get a lot of respect from students	.38076	-0.27195
(QSL) Quality of School Life scale	.37267	-0.19038
(R1) Asian	.36356	0.18486
( 7) I really don't want to work with people	.36068	-0.11211
( 1) I would like to make a lot of money	.35834	-0.10781
( 5) Teachers get many salary raises	.35657	0.09665
(C3) Does your family talk with you about careers, . . .	.35506	0.11769
(C4) Do you and your friends talk about careers, . . .	.35300	-0.10573
(11) My family thinks I should be a teacher	.35125	0.09276

Level of significance for all variables ( $p = .000$ )

**Table 10. Discriminant Analysis—Bipolar Extremes of the grouped Interest in Teaching Scale—Partial Multivariate F Values and Pooled Within-Groups Correlations between Discriminating Variables and Canonical Discriminant Functions**

Source of Variation	Partial Multivariate F Value at Conclusion of Analysis	Item-to-Function Correlation (pooled) Function 1
( 4) I would like very much to teach children	226.6400	0.84318
(13) I would not mind working for just 9-10 months a year	23.2090	0.26513
(12) Teachers make a lot of money	2.7601	0.20615
( 2) Teachers get a lot of respect from students	12.0750	0.02071
(QSL) Quality of School Life scale	5.7513	-0.26711
(R1) Asian	6.1246	0.05700
( 7) I really don't want to work with people	2.3580	-0.17290
( 1) I would like to make a lot of money	1.9977	-0.18116
( 5) Teachers get many salary raises	1.2434	0.10831
(C3) Does your family talk with you about careers, . . .	2.3279	0.09356
(C4) Do you and your friends talk about careers, . . .	1.8498	0.08741
(11) My family thinks I should be a teacher	1.0187	0.33811
( 9) Teachers don't have a lot of problems with students	0.85784	-0.02092
(R2) Afro	0.68655	-0.03148
(C2) Does your teacher talk with you about careers, . . .	0.44534	0.07233
( 3) People don't think teachers are very important	0.43911	0.01114
(GPA) Grade Point Average	0.40099	0.11532
( 8) I would like to work for 12 months a year	0.31818	0.04797
(10) My friends don't think I should be a teacher	0.29992	-0.06143
(Lunch) Lunch Program Participation	0.78405E-01	0.04759
(C1) Do you think about what you will do when you are done with school	0.57590E-01	0.04907
(R5) European	0.54446E-01	-0.04448
(FatherEd) Father's Education	0.40834E-01	-0.02633
(R4) Native American	0.30954E-01	0.03169
(R3) Hispanic	0.18956E-01	0.02566
(G1) Boys	0.11489E-01	0.21108
(MotherEd) Mother's Education	0.68843E-02	-0.00111
( 6) It would cost too much to go to college to become a teacher	0.22787E-02	0.01664
(Extra) Extracurricular Activities Participation	0.92965E-07	0.02154